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"The worst insult is to be stereotyped"

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 Photo: Minna Ollikainen
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This year, the Film Festival has more than twenty films about the Islamic world. The series of films called the Focus on Islam have a message: there is no unified Islamic culture but many Islamic cultures. The aim is not to stress the role of the religion in the lives of the Muslims but to show different kinds of films that happen to originate from Islamic countries.

– I would not have come to the Film Festival unless I knew some of the organisers and believed that their goal is to show to the viewers the Islamic life the way it is, states **Hassan Dezvareh**, the Head of the Iranian Young Cinema Society.

In Dezvareh's opinion, the films in the series manage to represent every-day life.

According to **Hazim Bitar**, a Jordanian producer and director, the Focus on Islam is an excellent chance to start discussion and to show the variety of viewpoints inside Islam.

Zeina Durra, who was born in London and lives today in New York, tells that at first she had hesitated competing in the Islamic film series. It felt odd to her to become a poster child of Islam, because she does not define herself thorough religion.

– The worst insult is to be stereotyped. I would not put all of the Catholics into the same category because I know that there are differences.

"You do not have to prod at sensitive issues"

Derzvareh says, that in Iran all films do not end up in the cinemas.

– Films with nudity and violence are not shown in the cinema but you can buy them in markets with a few cents, he says.

– King Kong is shown in the cinema and nobody complains about that, smiles Pakistani Maheen Zia.

For Bitar taboos are not a problem.

– Every culture has its own sensitive issues and you do not have to prod at them.

Talking about social issues.

The modern youths of Iran are interested in making films, Dezvareh says. Many women are also involved and on some classes over half of the students are female.

In the recent years social issues, such as the gap between the rich and poor, have surfaced in the Iranian films. According to Bitar the same development is seen in Jordan, also.

– Films can give voice to the less fortunate in society, he points out.



Maheen Zia (left), Hassan Dezvareh and Hazim Bitar took part in a discussion about the current state of the Islamic films.